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are let by the cart-load, to be dug and dried in the usual manner, the general price is from 1s. to 1s. 3d. per cart load. But a great part of this expense is incurred in drying the peats after they are dug; for, by the common method, the peats are first spread upon the ground, and then put upon their ends in what are called Fittings—then put up in stacks of various dimensions, till they are become perfectly dry, and fit for being led home; and were it not for that additional labour, the peats could be dug and spread upon the ground in the usual manner, at one half of the expense incurred in compressing them.

"But then, it must be remarked, that compressed peats can be rendered perfectly dry, with equal saving of this additional labour, so that upon a fair estimate of the expense of the two methods of converting peat into fuel—that of compression would not much exceed that in common use; so that compression, in converting peat into fuel, will be productive of great advantages to those districts of the country that are dependent upon that substance for fuel." Y.

THE STEEL BOY.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

GRAY.

Walking, one fine day in autumn, through a retired part of the county of —, I saw, at some distance, a verdant hill, crowned by a couple of trees and something like ruins, which tempted me to turn off the road, and take a nearer view.

A genuine old Irish boreen (road), composed, as they usually are, of large stones in a kind of irregular pavement, led from the highway to the foot of the hill, and traversing the green sward to the summit, I found, on a closer approach, that what appeared to be ruins was, in fact, a receptacle for the ruins of human nature, *i. e.* a burial ground; the trees, two noble ash, planted by some sorrowing children of man, to mark the spot of earth that contained the remains of a beloved object.

Somewhat fatigued by a long walk, I sat on an elevated tomb, and, from the lofty situation of the place, commanded an extensive prospect of the surrounding country, which was not remarkable for the picturesque; its features were rather wild and bare, save that on the south-west there was some planting, and the varied hues of the foliage appeared to peculiar advantage in the light of a brilliant sun and cloudless sky.

With such sad mementos as those by which I was surrounded, I naturally fell into a train of serious reflection on the vanity and uncertainty of all sublunary things; and I felt inclined to exclaim, with the poet,

"Dust to dust concludes the noblest song."

While ruminating on "days of langsyne," I was aroused to the recollection of existing circumstances by hearing the funeral cry, harmonized by distance, like the wild notes of the Æolian harp. I can well recollect when I would run any length to avoid hearing the funeral cry, from a foolish dread of it imbibed during childhood, and many years elapsed ere I became reconciled to its wild tones, which, at a distance, are not unharmonious. I cannot say so much when in its immediate vicinity. I turned round, and beheld a long procession ascending the hill. There were, in front, a number of females, in white and very light coloured gowns—the two first carrying what is called a garland, *viz.* a pole, with hoops horizontally fastened to the upper part, covered with curled paper—with the figures of long and short gloves, cut in paper, suspended to it—surmounted by a cross. Following these, were a good many girls, two and two, each bearing a white rod tipped with curled paper. This part of the procession appeared to be regulated by a man on each side, who kept the crowd from mingling with the garland bearers. There was no regularity among those who followed, save that, as is usual in this part of the country, the females take the lead at funerals.

I should have liked to witness the ceremonies of this interment unperceived; but here there was no chance; so I went forth to meet them, and returned among the crowd.

It is melancholy to witness the apathy and levity with which most persons, both high and low, attend the remains of their fellow mortals to the tomb; but among the lower orders, whose habits are free from the restraints of etiquette, this indecency of behaviour (I can give it no milder epithet) is most visible.

I joined a group of men, on one side, who seemed rather surprised at meeting a person of my appearance in such a retired spot; however, it was but momentary; for the conversation was soon resumed by the younger part of them.

"Bad luck t'ye, Barney," said a fine-looking young fellow, with a set of teeth that rivalled the whitest ivory, "but that was a nice trick ye pled on the girls last night; myself was kilt out wid the laughin'."

"I'm the boy to please them," replied Barney, a bold, dissipated-looking young man, with his hat set upon the back of his head. "Fwhisper, boys," and he added something I could not hear, which set them a-laughing.

"Isn't a wondher but ye're ashamed iv sich behaviour," said an old man, "an' does'nt know how soon ye'r own turn 'll come."

"Soon enough to bid the devil the time iv day, fwhen ye meet 'im," retorted Barney, and then, with his companions fell behind.

I suppose it was in reply to the old man's remark that another said, "Och! the Lord fit an' prepare us for that day! amen, achiernah. Arrah, Billy, had ye's a good fair? fwhat way was the pigs?"

The person addressed made a suitable answer, and these sober men entered into a discussion on the probable rise and fall of swine, which disgusted me just as much as the hilarity of the youths, and I passed on to the rear of the females.

Two young girls, who just left the criers, next engaged my attention.

"That's a purty pathern in Peggy Burke's gown," said one. "D'ye know fwhere did she buy it, Biddy?"

"Musha, then, it'd be hard for me, an' it not her own," replied the other.

"O virra! an' as grand as she is," continued the first.

"Aye, faix, shure its fwhat she borret (borrowed) from the cook at the big house," said the other. "An' afther all she got from the gentleman, ye know, sorra dacent faggot she has now, barrin' that red shawl, an' that same's no great things vid the constant washin'."

Two old women came between me and the young ones, talking vehemently. Now, I shall hear some sympathy for the friends of the deceased, thought I.

"Molly, avourneen, the heart widin me is sore," said one, as they pushed before me.

"Och! an' shure its no wondher," returned the other.

"Strugglin' an' slavin' from daylight tal night, in could an' wet," continued the first, "an' afther all to think iv one's armin' goin' sich a way."

"The girls is a great throuble to us any way," said the other.

"Ne'er a word iv lie ye say, Molly; and wid my will, sorra ring ever Barney Doyle 'll put on my little girl's finger," replied the first.

"There worse nor him in the world," said the other; "he's not a bad doin' boy."

"Sugh! bad luck to his breed," cried the first, spitting on the ground. He'll never join any one belonging to me. I'd sooner cry over my little girl on the table, nor a beggarly Doyle id have her."

Young and old, thought I, are the same, each solely occupied in their own concerns. I moved hastily forward, and entered the cemetery among the foremost.

The usual ceremony of going thrice round the site of the ruined edifice was performed, and then the coffin was set down on a tomb-stone, until the grave was dug. During this process, a number of women rushed to different parts of the yard, some to scream, and some to pray at the graves of their relatives. The uproar was really astounding; and, to be as much away from it as possible, I went to the most remote corner, and seated myself, by an old man, on a stone.

"A poor sight, Sir," said he. "God help us, an' look down on the sore hearts this day."

"Death," I replied, "is an awful event; we cannot tell

when his stroke may fall on ourselves; we should, therefore, strive to be always ready to meet him."

"Och, och! thrue for ye, Sir—thru for ye, dear. Lord, prepare us for that hour!"

"This is an unmarried person they are interring?" said I.

"Aye, Sir, as purty a young girl as you could see in the three parishes, God rest her soul! she didn't lave her fellow afther her. Och! more's the pity she to be taken, an' sich as me left on the world."

"We should not question the will of God," I remarked.

"No, no, Sir; I ax His pardon. Sure, fwhy wouldn't he know fwhat's best. Only, Sir, it's a sore sight to look at the poor young girl's mother; an' she has none but her, God comfort her this day."

"What caused her death?" I asked.

"Faix, Sir, mysel' doesn't rightly know; some says one thing, and some says another: any way, I think it was trouble kilt her entirely."

"That is strange in a young person," said I.

"Young enough, Sir—not two score out; for all that, she had trouble plenty."

"Was she deceived by any person?"

"Och! no, Sir. God forbid! Its a long story, Sir. Didn't ye hear iv the night-walkers that was goin' through the country, callin' themselves Steel Boys?"

I replied in the affirmative, adding, that I was surprised—having imagined the country quiet.

"An' so it ought, Sir, an' every country. Fwhat's the use in night-walkin'? Ne'er a ha'porth, only bringin' trouble on all belongin' to them, as ye may see, Sir, afore ye now. My heavy hathred on them that couldn't let us alone."

My curiosity was aroused; and finding the old man went home by the way I intended to go, we set out together, and, during a long walk, I learned from him the following particulars, which I shall communicate in my own way, divesting them of the endless "says hes" and "says shes" that accompanied the narration.

Thomas Molloy was the youngest son of a widow, and resided with his mother, in the mud-wall cabin where he first saw the light. Tom, as he was generally called, was good tempered, sober, and industrious. I do not mean to say that he was a *rara avis*; he loved sport as well as most young men, and frequented the ball-alley, fairs, markets, wakes, and dances; but still he contrived to have his work regularly done, and was ready to pay the rent when called on. Moreover, Tom was a well made, handsome, young fellow, who had a good coat, black silk cravat, and other appropriate necessities for dress, which so captivated the matrons, on their way to the chapel on Sundays, that they usually remarked, "Tom Molloy's a clane, dacent boy; an' it'll be happy for the girl that gets 'im."

In consequence of such remarks, the girls, one and all, were throwing sheep's eyes at Tom, but in vain—so at least thought the fair ones. However, one Sunday, at a cake, he proved himself not insensible.

For the information of those who may not be erudite in country amusements, I may observe that, in rustic dialect, cake and dance are synonymous terms. When a cottage vender of the native, viz. poteen, has a good stock on hand, she (for in this case the female is the active partner) gets a large cake made, containing plenty of sugar and carrot-seeds. This, on the appointed day, generally Sunday afternoon, is covered with as white a cloth as can be had, and placed on a churn-dash stuck in the ground. A fiddler is engaged, young people collect, and dancing commences.

Now, among all ranks dancing is a thirsty amusement; therefore, there are frequent demands on the native. The evening is concluded by a general drinking bout; and the young man who conceives he has most money to spend, takes down the cake, puts it into the lap of the girl he most prefers, who makes a division of it among their friends.

It was on an occasion of this nature that Tom provoked the envy of half the girls in the parish, by gallantly taking down the cake, and putting it into the lap of Mary Collins, a blooming, black-eyed damsel of eighteen. From this time they were all in all to each other. But when did the

course of true love run smooth? Mary's father was averse to the match. Collins was what is called well to do in the world, and looked higher for his daughter. He acknowledged Tom Molloy was "a likely (handsome) cleverly boy, that no one could fault; but he'd like a young couple to have something to begin wid."

"It's little was between yersel' an' me the first day," his wife would reply, who was won over by her daughter's importunity, "an' fwhat are we the worse iv it now?"

"Sorra hair I care," was the reply. "Iv I was a fool, its no reason I'd let my child be one, nor I wont."

But after much importunity and cavilling, and on the widow's giving up the bit of land, Collins at length was brought round. The bride's clothes were bought, and every thing was settled for the marriage.

Two days before, there was a market in a neighbouring town, to which Tom went on some business. He set out alone, and, light of heart, whistled as he went, not for want of thought; for the delightful idea that Mary was to be his own in two days, was never absent a moment.

I have said Tom was sober; but he met many acquaintances, and could not avoid sharing in many treats of spirits; for among a certain class of our countrymen, friendship and good neighbourhood are nothing, if not occasionally cemented by a glass.

When evening drew on, and he was about to return, he encountered a neighbouring young man.

"Shure, Paddy," said Tom, "I didn't know ye wor for the market, an' we might be together."

"I didn't know it mysel' at the time," replied the other. "An' fwhere's this ye're for now, boy."

"Home."

"Whooh! time enough this two hours; wait for me, an' I'll be wid ye. Come in, and take a dhrop iv somethin'."

"Thank ye, kindly, Paddy, but I tuk plenty—sorra dhrop I could take."

"Well, come in any way—shure we wont eat ye."

"No, nor drink me, I'll warrant, fwhere ye can get better stuff," said Tom, as they entered the public house.

In one of the rooms they met a company of seven or eight men, among whom, it appeared, Paddy had previously been.

Just about this time, the hitherto peaceable country had been disturbed by parties of the deluded peasantry, assuming the name of Steel Boys, and going about at night, taking up arms.

Tom had been repeatedly solicited to join them, but always declined, which exasperated some of the leading spirits, who swore that he should be one of them by the way of no thanks.

It was into a party of these midnight legislators that Tom was now introduced; but they did not at once betray the cloven foot. His approaching marriage was no secret, and, for some time, furnished a theme of conversation and country wit.

Tom had already drank more than usual, and a few extra glasses put him so much off his guard, that they administered the oath which bound him to their cause.

Sometime after night had fallen they all left the town, and being neighbours, took the road that led to their own townland, but, at a certain cross-road, turned out of the direct way.

"Fwhere are ye's goin', boys?" asked Tom, who was not so much elevated as to mistake the road. "Shure this isn't the way home."

"He's in a hurry to his darlint," said one. "Take id asy, Tom; many's the day in seven years."

"Aye, faix, an' night too," responded another.

"Shure it can't be ye're goin' to do any thin' the night boys," continued Tom.

"An' what iv we have a bit iv a spree? we're the boys that's steel to the back bone!" cried two or three together.

"Ye may go then," said Tom; "sorra toe I'll go wid ye."

"Arra, wont ye?" replied his friend Paddy. "Be all the books that ever was shut an' opened, ye'll never sleep tal we see fwhat stuff ye're med iv. Now turn back, iv ye dare."

"Iv ye didn't like to be one iv us, fwat med ye swear, Tom?" asked one of the men.

"Swear!—an' did I swear?" said Tom. "Shure it's jokin' ye are?"

"There's no joke like a true one; an' ye swore without doubt," replied the same man.

"That's enough, boys; no goin' beyant an oath," returned Tom, and accompanied them in silence.

"Have a care iv him," whispered Paddy to the next man.

"Never fere; he'll not part from us alive," replied the other.

Surprise, at finding himself thus trepanned, completely sobered Tom; and after a train of most uneasy reflection, he resolved that this night once over, he never would be in the same situation again. "I'll do fwat a man ought," thought he, "an' not lave it in any one's power to say I'm a coward."

Their first essay, on that night, was at the porter's lodge of a gentleman's demesne, where, their scouts informed them, there were only women in the house; and so little were they expected, that the iron gate was only latched, it not being quite nine o'clock. They had no difficulty in possessing themselves of a gun, the only arms the lodge contained. The poor woman was much frightened, and offered them whatever money she had, begging of them to spare her life.

"We're no robbers," one of them replied; "ye may put up the money; we're decent boys; sorra hair o' yer head we'll touch; only give us all the arms."

At length they departed, in high glee at their success, and proceeded across the country, to another house they had set. But here they entered not so easily. The family were in bed, and the party on the outside had some work ere they forced in the door, and secured two men who were in the house; but, ere they found the arms, one of the men left to watch on the outside ran in, saying, there were some persons approaching—the night was so dark he could not say how many. Friends they could not be, as they knew not of any other party out that night; therefore, there was a general rush to the door. The last man had just gained the outside, and the light of two candles, gleaming through the open door, revealed them to the approaching party, who were so near that they plainly heard a voice exclaim, "There they are!—there they are! Fire, boys!" And in an instant the report of more than one musket was heard, followed by a heavy fall and deep groan. The gallant steel boys waited not to assist the fallen, but, without delay, escaped, favoured by darkness.

The police, for such the other party were, headed by the gentlemen whose lodge had been attacked, leaving two men to secure the wounded, gave instant chase, but in vain.

In the mean while, the wounded man, for there was but one, was carried into the house in a state of insensibility, and various were the comments passed on him. An old woman, holding a candle over his face, exclaimed, "Och, och! but he's the purty boy!—more was the pity!—the Lord between us an' harm."

"Is he kilt out?" asked another.

"Only wounded, I think," said a policeman; "he's beginning to come to. If he staid quietly at home, this wouldnt happen him."

"Thruce for ye, sir, dear," replied the old woman; "sorra good ever cum out iv night-walking. Forreer gair! the youngsters doesn't think so."

"Och! God help every poor sinner that must go through fwaths allotted for im," said another woman.

This doctrine of fatalism is too prevalent among the lower orders of our country; and one of the policemen was about to show the error of it, when the wounded man, slowly unclosing his eyes, murmured, "Mother, avourneen! Mary, darlint! fwere am I?—fwat happened me at all? Mary, asthore machree! don't cry—I wont go from ye; we'll be marret the morra, agra, girl. Och! the pain about my heart!" and feebly putting his hand on his side, he remained silent.

The women were greatly affected, and, with streaming eyes, frequently exclaimed, "Wirra strua!" The men, albeit unused to the melting mood, were seen to draw the backs of their hands across their eyes.

The policemen endeavoured to moralize on the occurrence, and point out the evils that this system of lawlessness brought on families and the country generally. But they talked to the winds; for the women, though they seemed to assent, saying, "Thruce for ye, Sir," and "Ne'er a word iv a lie in it," knew not well what they said, but constantly interrupted them thus: "Oh! wirra! wirra! God look down on yer poor mother this night, but it's she has the sore heart afore her! and the little girl fwat'll she do afther ye? Och, hone! The Lord purtect all belongin' to us."

It was a considerable time before the party returned from the pursuit, and unsuccessful. On the first appearance of day-light, the wounded man was conveyed, on a car, to the next town, for the benefit of medical assistance.

The magistrate vainly endeavoured to make him confess who were his accomplices. But, during the intervals of consciousness, the poor young man uttered only lamentations, calling on his mother and Mary, pleading with them, in the most heart-felt tones, not to forsake him.

The opinion of the medical man was decidedly unfavourable; the wound he pronounced mortal, and that the patient could not survive many hours.

It is to be supposed the men who were poor Tom's companions gave information to his family of what had occurred; for early in the day his mother and brother made application to see him. That the interview was a most affecting one, may be imagined; but my informant knew no more of it than that Tom bitterly lamented his folly in being tempted to drink so much; for if he had been sober he never would have joined the steel boys. And the old man added, "Och! my curse on the fwisky! it's it kilt him out an' out."

I afterwards learned, from another person, that his poor mother was like one distracted, and unable to speak or weep, sat with his hand in hers the image of despair. After the first ebullition of feeling was past, the brother appeared to think more of the safety of Tom's accomplices than any thing else.

"Tom, dear," he said, "it was a sore lot was laid out for ye, an' ye must go through it. Oh, wirra! it's soon for ye to die; but there's no help for it; any way, ye'll die like a man."

"Och, och! Ned, dear," replied the sufferer, "must I leave the world, an' my darlint Mary?"

"Tom, avourneen! mind fwat I tell ye: the doctor says, there's no help for ye in this world; then die like a man—don't let any one be cursin' yer bones in the ground."

"Fwwhy should they be cursin' me?" demanded Tom.

"Fwwhy, wouldn't they iv ye turn informer—fwat good will it do ye, or any one belongin' t'ye? Och, Tom, darlint, don't disgrace yer family an' yer own bones in the clay."

His mother made no request, but she pressed his hand, and the young man groaned deeply, but did not reply. Before he spoke again, a minister of his church came to give him its last rites.

It is astonishing how anxious people, in general, are to communicate bad news. Poor Mary Collins was, early that day, abruptly informed her betrothed was killed; and, for hours, she was attacked by fainting fits. Next morning when it seemed necessary to preserve her life, her parents reluctantly consented that she should see Tom; but they had not gone more than half-way to the town, when they met his remains conveying to his father's house. He had died the evening before, and, much to his friends' satisfaction, carried the secret of his accomplices to the grave. The heart-rending scene that followed may be supposed. Poor Mary's hopes of happiness were buried with him, on the day that was to have been her bridal one. She never held up her head, and, in a very short time, followed him.

Her's was the interment I witnessed in the lonely church-yard.

W.

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